

EXHIBIT 26
DATE 3-5-07
HB 808

Hearing on HB 808

Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

I am opposed to HB 808, the funding bill for the Department of Public Health and Human Services, in its current form. I would support this bill if it were amended to include funding for the Montana Youth Leadership Forum for students with disabilities. This program was funded by the previous legislature and was included in the Governor's budget introduced earlier this session. Unfortunately, HB 808 does not include funding for this great program.

The Montana Youth Leadership Forum is a program designed for juniors and seniors in high school that have disabilities. The weeklong Forum's main objective is helping these students transition from high school to college and to the "real world" of work and independence. The forum provides information on services available to the disabled and teaches self advocacy and leadership skills. The majority of forum presenters and speakers have a disability themselves, and thus they have already lived through the struggle disabled people can encounter in their daily life.

The Montana Youth Leadership Forum has been very successful in its first seven years, with an almost perfect high school graduation rate of its delegates, as well as a high job placement rate after school. The Montana Youth Leadership Forum for students with disabilities is a great investment for Montana, and I encourage you to add \$50,000/year funding for this program into HB 808. Thank you.

Gene Hermanson,
Helena, Montana